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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 002051

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2015

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM JO

SUBJECT: JORDAN: ALI HATTAR SLANDER CASE PROCEEDS

REF: A. AMMAN 571

1B. AMMAN 686

1C. AMMAN 1924

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) Defense witnesses testified on March 7 in the case of Engineers' Association member Ali Hattar, who is accused of slandering the government during a speech he delivered at the Professional Associations complex on December 14 (refs A and B). The lecture, entitled "Why We Boycott America," was organized by the associations' banned anti-normalization committee. Hattar is being tried in the Court of First Instance on charges of violating Article 191 of the Penal Code.

12. (U) During the session, Engineer Sufian Tell, one of four defense witnesses who attended the lecture, said: "I attended the entire lecture and I did not hear Hattar curse or slander the government," according to the English-language Jordan Times. The judge adjourned the session until March 21 to hear more defense witnesses in the case.

13. (U) Hattar pleaded not guilty to the charges when his trial opened last month, according to the press report. In a written statement presented to the judge, Hattar claimed that he was "only delivering a scientific lecture and exercising his constitutional right of freedom of expression."

14. (C) Comment: The substance of Hattar's alleged criticism of the government is unclear; post is seeking a copy of the indictment. Although his brief detention and release on bail in December generated widespread local press coverage, his court case, which proceeds against the backdrop of the festering conflict between the GOJ and the professional associations over the latter's alleged "political activity," has not (ref C). This may be deliberate: a journalist told IO on January 27 that the GOJ had issued "instructions" to the media not to report the mention of Ali Hattar during President Bush's press conference the day before, an order with which they dutifully complied.

15. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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HALE